

Section IX

Responsibility 7: Standardized
Requirements for Annual Reporting

IX. Standardized Requirements for Annual Reporting

“Establishment of standardized requirements for annual reporting of statistical information from public and public charter schools...” State Education Establishment Act of 2000, Section 6(b)(7).

A. Background

1. Introduction

Stakeholders in the educational system rely on information to carry out their professional and personal responsibilities. Researchers, policy makers, parents, educators, administrators, and the general public all need and use information to make decisions about education. For example, parents want answers to questions about individual schools when choosing a school for their child. Policymakers rely on information to guide them when they set educational policy. To this end, information publicly reported by the D.C. Public Schools and public charter schools needs to be reliable, comparable, and easily accessible because it is relied upon and valued in making decisions about how to educate our children and improve our schools.

The following study of this proposed SEO responsibility reviews the extent to which this function is now being carried out and examines possibilities as to how the State Education Office could perform this function in the future, as well as the potential benefits for the quality of education in the District of Columbia.

2. Legislation

Other than the State Education Office Establishment Act, there is no specific legislation that establishes this function as a state-level responsibility.

3. History

Numerous reports have been written and public criticism has called attention to vexing problems with the availability and reliability of information about elementary and secondary education in the District of Columbia. For example, in a 1989 report, “Our Children, Our Future: Revitalizing the District of Columbia Public Schools,” the D.C. Committee on Public Education (C.O.P.E.) found that “basic management information systems were lacking, and that without such information management of the school system is extremely difficult.” A 1998 report entitled, “Rebuilding the D.C. Schools,” commissioned by the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority and the D.C. Public Schools, and prepared by the Council of the Great City Schools and the McKenzie Group, found in DCPS “a management information system that was inadequate to provide the Superintendent with the guidance she (needed) to ensure smooth operations.”

A September 1999 report by the D.C. Appleseed Center, titled “Reforming the D.C. Board of Education: A Building Block for Better Public Schools,” contains the following statement:

“The dearth of dependable data about the District of Columbia’s school system is legendary. Uncertainty over such basic information as the number of students enrolled or the number of teachers employed has made rational decision-making difficult for the Superintendent and the Board of Education, and, on budget matters, for the D.C. Council, the Mayor, and Congress.”

The report continues by suggesting the types of information that should be regularly available to the Board of Education and to the public. These include the following:

- summaries of student achievement indicators, including standardized test score results;
- accurate and periodic reports on total enrollment, enrollment by school and grade, the number of children eligible for various Federal programs and meal subsidies, and the number of children whose language is other than English;
- accurate and periodic information on the characteristics and qualifications of the teaching force, on turnover rate by school, and on other matters related to staffing;
- an up-to-date, long-range facilities plan, including a high-quality facilities utilization report;
- operating and capital budgets that are transparent enough for Board members, Council members, the Mayor’s staff, the public, the press, and Congress to understand; and
- accurate annual profiles on each school, with current data on enrollment, performance, student population, and special programs.

A current D.C. Appleseed Center report, “Charter Schools in the District of Columbia: Improving Systems for Accountability, Autonomy, and Competition,” April 2001, notes the lack of comparable, publicly available information on the city’s public schools (both traditional and charter), making it difficult for parents to feel confident when choosing a school for their child. The report recommends that “the District’s newly created State Education Office (the “SEO”) be vested with legal authority for collecting and disseminating data on public schools and that it take steps to assure the provision of better and more accessible public information, such as:

- Define what will be made publicly available to parents regarding all public schools — both traditional and charter. The information should reflect what educators believe correlates to high-quality education and what parents value personally in the public education context, such as student achievement and other outcome indicators,

enrollment/demographic data, learning environment data, curriculum information, and information about the neighborhood within which the school is located.

- Define information content and submission procedures in a way that does not create an undue burden on schools.
- (Make information about all public schools) broadly available through a concerted public information campaign designed to ensure that District of Columbia residents know where to obtain the school information that they need.”

4. Current Status

As part of the study of this function, SEO staff gathered information about reporting requirements for which the D.C. Public Schools and public charter schools are currently responsible. Examples of report forms or descriptions of the required contents of such reports were also gathered and analyzed to determine the kinds of information being reported.

There are scores of reports that are required each year from DCPS. These include financial reports, staffing reports, student enrollment reports, reports of participation in subsidized meal programs, reports on special education compliance, reports to satisfy the requirements of several Federal categorical grants programs, and a long list of others. Responsibility for preparing and submitting these reports is distributed among several offices across the DCPS system.

Fewer reports are required of public charter schools. However, each public charter school must submit an annual enrollment count in order to receive its share of appropriated funds. Public charter schools also have reporting responsibilities to their chartering authority, including certain information they are required by law to report annually. Public charter schools also must report, through DCPS, certain information related to their participation in Federal categorical programs.

It is clear that much information already is collected and reported. In fact, most of the information that would likely be expected to constitute a reliable core of public information already appears in one or more of the existing reports; however, there appears to be little or no effort to organize this information in an understandable and useful way for public access and use.

In carrying out the study of this function, SEO staff also conducted interviews and meetings with many individuals. Special effort was made to talk to three general categories of individuals: managers of databases or information systems, persons responsible for analyzing and reporting information, and individuals and organizations that are information users.

Through these interviews we learned the following:

- There are several information systems operated by the D.C. Public Schools. These include a student information system, a human resources information system, a special education information system, a language assessment skills data base, a student assessment data base, a financial information system, and several smaller information systems, including facilities, transportation, and food services, as well as others.
- Several of these systems are being upgraded at the present time. For example, the Special Education Tracking System (SETS) is an ambitious and promising new special education information system that is now ready for service at nearly full capacity.
- The student information system is in the process of migrating from one software program to another. The new system has several advantages. It is compatible with standards widely used by schools and state education agencies, as well as the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), it has better editing controls, it allows better reporting, and it has a larger number of available data fields.
- The human resources information system is moving from the city's CAPS system to an information system that uses Peoplesoft software and is managed by the DCPS Office of Human Resource Management.
- In the past, the several DCPS information systems tended to operate independently; there were few links between them. It is expected that the student information system and the human resources information system will be linked by 2002.
- There is no fully operational universal tracking system for students in the District of Columbia. There are still numerous public charter schools where students are not assigned a unique student ID number generated by a single central student identification system managed by DCPS.
- Responsible officials within DCPS appear to be making serious efforts to improve the school system's information systems, and some observable progress has been made. One example is the development of the Special Education Tracking System.
- There is far less information available from public charter schools than is available from the D.C. Public Schools. The two chartering authorities differ in the amount and types of information they gather. Information available from charter schools may not be comparable from school to school, and often does not share common data definitions with DCPS. Since, under current laws, public charter schools have no legal obligation to submit information and reports directly to the State Education Office, the SEO will need to rely on their voluntary cooperation, and the cooperation of the two chartering authorities in order to assure that sufficient, comparable data are available from charter schools.

5. Expectations of the State Education Office

In addition, interviewees, when asked their views about the SEO role regarding standardized data reporting, generally expressed their belief that:

- a dependable core of critical information about education policy issues, the management of school system resources, school programs and operations, and student outcomes should be gathered and made publicly accessible;
- comparable information should be available from both DCPS and public charter schools, and, to the extent possible, from independent schools, private schools, and parochial schools, and also should include information about students who are home schooled; and
- developing and managing a process that assures that such information is publicly available is an appropriate responsibility for the State Education Office.

SEO consultation on this function also included an interview with key planners of the Safe Passages Information System. Safe Passages is an effort by multiple agencies providing services to children and youth to link their several data systems in a way that facilitates a multi-agency case management approach to addressing the needs of individual youth services clients.

B. Description of Practices in Other States

The following four states have been selected as examples of exemplary practices for their systems of reporting and research: Texas, Ohio, California, and Maryland. These four states have established high standards for good reporting practices and data collecting statewide. Their SEAs are a central source for statistical and comprehensive data on students and schools on state, county, district, and local school levels. These states demonstrate a good understanding of the need for quality data and data reporting to serve the needs of students, teachers, parents, policy-makers, and researchers. They have established standards that combat the problems frequently faced by SEAs and LEAs with insufficient, inaccurate data, inaccessible, “scattered” data, and duplicative, burdensome reporting. Their role as a central repository of information on public education for the state is vital.

Essential to improving a system of collecting and reporting student/school data is the establishment of rules concerning the type of data that must be reported and consistency in the format used for reporting. A repository of common data elements is necessary to facilitate state- and district-wide reporting and research purposes. To this end, these SEAs have established a statewide set of common information to be reported by their districts. All school sites and program offices use the same data elements and definitions necessary for reporting and sharing information. In addition to providing a clear, concise picture on specific areas, this enables comparative reporting and research, and a better analysis of the general state of education.

Texas

In compliance with the Texas Education Code, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) uses the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) to collect and report data statewide on public education. School districts, established Education Service Centers (ESC), and the TEA work together in carrying out the PEIMS process. Procedures and rules have been established by the TEA to foster this operation. Specifically, the TEA requires school districts to annually provide four different data submissions. Districts pass data to their respective Education Service Center (ESC) for validation, and then the ESC transmits final validated reports to the TEA to meet specified due dates. The TEA never views individual student records.

The TEA PEIMS Data Standards provides specific instructions to:

- school districts on how to submit their data via computer files, what data to submit, and when to submit it;
- the ESCs in assisting districts with the process collection, validation, and transfer; and
- the TEA regarding its responsibility to facilitate the overall operation.

The major categories of data collected are organization data, budget data, actual financial data, staff data, student demographic, program participation, and prior year school leaver data, student attendance, course completion, and discipline data.

PEIMS encompasses all data requested and received by the TEA about public education. PEIMS data come from several sources. The first, already discussed, is data that are collected through the PEIMS electronic collection method utilizing an established system of standard data items, definitions, codes, formats, procedures, and dates for collection. Additionally, other collections, calculations, and analyses of data used for evaluating, monitoring, or auditing public education supplement the PEIMS collected data. Currently, the TEA is working to integrate systems and develop an agency-wide system of information.

More information, specifics regarding data submission responsibilities and specifications, data submission requirements, description of data elements, and description of codes may be found in the TEA 2001-2002 Public Education Information Management System Data Standard.

Ohio

The Ohio Department of Education uses the Education Management Information System (EMIS) as a central source for collecting and reporting data on public education in Ohio. The system was established in response to a legislative mandate that requested the Board of Education to adopt the rule for school districts to develop and implement a statewide

data system. Consequently, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction created a EMIS Standards and Reporting Committee to handle the task of establishing rules for the operation of such a system. Rules laying out the infrastructure and operation of EMIS were finalized and approved in April 1991. The *Ohio Education Management Information System: Definitions, Procedures, and Guidelines* (EMIS Guide) provides the foundation for the Ohio EMIS by establishing specific definitions, guidelines, and procedures to be followed for implementation and management of the system. (Ohio Administrative Code, Rule 3301-14-01: Rule for the Operation of the Education Management System).

School districts, data acquisition sites, and the Ohio Department of Education have specific responsibilities regarding the creation, collection, validation, transfer, and final reporting of data. They carry out these responsibilities in a manner and on a schedule set forth in the EMIS Guide. Some school districts create data files on local computers and transfer them to data acquisition sites; other districts will create their files at their data acquisition sites; some districts do both. Data acquisition sites coordinate the collection, submission, and aggregation of the data for their districts, and assist districts with performing their responsibilities. Data acquisition sites validate, then transfer data to the Department of Education.

What data is to be reported and data definitions are specified in the EMIS Guide. Data fall into four categories: student, staff, financial, and general information. All procedures and guidelines for operation of the system are in the EMIS Guide. At no time does the Department of Education view individual student records.

California

The California Basic Education Data system is the main system used to collect annual information from every district, school, and staff. However, to address information quality issues, California is currently implementing a new statewide system, California School Information Services (CSIS), for collecting and reporting educational data, and also transferring student records to post-secondary institutions in California. LEA participation in this program is voluntary; however, 95% LEA participation is expected by 2004. The operation of converting schools for participation in CSIS began in 1999.

It is expected that CSIS will discontinue approximately 40 current data submissions, as one of the main purposes for implementation of CSIS is to standardize data submissions. CSIS will establish standard data elements with standard definitions to be reported in a standard format. Student data types will include student identification, student demographics, enrollment, attendance, special programs, assessment, staff, institution, and general information.

Maryland

The Division of Planning, Results, and Information Management within the Maryland State Department of Education maintains the Data Warehouse and is responsible for

collecting and reporting information on education for the state. Reporting adheres to policies and procedures established by the Maryland State Department of Education. LEAs report accordingly, using statewide data elements and definitions established by the Department.

Summary of Findings

Data collection and quality reporting works in these states because all parties involved adhere to standards that have been established by the SEA. LEAs follow established guidelines by reporting data to the SEA in a specified format using data elements and data definitions that are consistent statewide. As a result, the SEA is able to fulfill the essential role of serving as a central repository of general student and school information available to service the information needs of students, parents, educators, administrators, policy-makers, and researchers.

C. Statement of Options

Option One: The SEO does not assume responsibility for the function.

Discussion: This function currently is not assigned to any other agency. As public institutions, there is an implied responsibility for DCPS and public charter schools to make information about their programs publicly available. However, there is no common understanding of what information should be made publicly available, in what form it should be provided, or to whom and under what conditions it should be accessible.

Advantages:

- There are no compelling advantages for the SEO to decline a role in improving the quality and accessibility of public information about schools in the District of Columbia by providing leadership in the area of standardizing requirements for annual reporting.

Disadvantages:

- If the SEO does not assume responsibility for working with DCPS and public charter schools on this important issue, it is unlikely to be addressed.
- Without the public availability of dependable information, the State Education Office would be unable to implement a key SEO strategy: facilitating education reform through the availability of reliable information that could lead to closer scrutiny of existing schools and programs, more informed public debate, enhanced tools for school improvement, and a better basis for parents to make an informed choice of a school for their child.

Option Two: The SEO works with DCPS and public charter schools, providing leadership for developing and agreeing on common definitions of core data elements, as well as establishing quality standards for public reporting of statistical data.

Discussion: The SEO would work with DCPS and public charter schools to reach agreement on common definitions and comparable data sets, establish quality standards, and develop an annual process for public reporting. However, responsibility for the development, maintenance, and internal quality control of their own data systems would remain firmly under the control the charter schools, the chartering authorities, and the D.C Public Schools.

Advantages:

- Could enhance improvements already underway in DCPS's internal information systems.
- Could lead to improved data management and reporting by public charter schools and the two chartering authorities.
- This responsibility is similar to the information reporting function of other State Education Agencies.

Disadvantages:

- DCPS is already making progress in improving some of its internal information systems. Any initiative by the SEO to improve the quality of information and information reporting would need to be extremely sensitive and respectful toward those efforts.
- It might be difficult to get common information reported from charter and private schools.
- Because of separate reporting by DCPS, public charter schools and independent and private schools, there would be no organized central source of comparable information from all schools.

Option Three: In addition to the SEO working with DCPS and public charter schools to develop common definitions and data quality standards, the SEO is responsible for establishing procedures to assure the provision of reliable and publicly accessible information on public education for students who are residents of the District of Columbia.

Discussion: Under this option all data would be gathered and provided by DCPS and by the two Eligible Chartering Authorities in the District of Columbia; no new data would be collected by the State Education Office.

All information would be entered into a database managed by the SEO. The database would include information on a carefully selected set of indicators in such categories as education policy, management of school and school system resources, school programs and operations, aggregate information on staff and students characteristics, and student outcomes. The database would contain no information on individual staff members or students.

Under this option, efforts would be made to include, to the extent possible, existing information about the demographic characteristics and schooling of students who are DC residents, but who attend independent, private, or parochial schools, or who are home schooled.

This option also assumes that the SEO would provide for public reporting of the data that are gathered and entered into the data base.

Advantages:

- Would provide educators, policy-makers, public officials, parents, researchers, and other interested citizens with ready access to important information about schooling in the District of Columbia.
- Could enhance improvements already underway in DCPS's internal information systems.
- Availability of comparable information would permit the tracking of educational opportunity, performance, and accountability across the District of Columbia. Annual data entry would permit tracking of progress over time.
- The function is compatible with purpose of the State Education Office.
- This responsibility is similar to the information reporting function of other State Education Agencies.
- The SEO is well-situated organizationally to mediate differences regarding what information would be made publicly accessible.

Disadvantages:

- At the present time, information available from public charter schools is minimal. The SEO's ability to gather additional comparable information would likely be dependent upon voluntary participation by charter schools.
- There could be disagreement regarding the indicators that should be tracked.

D. Recommendation and Rationale

Recommendation

The State Education Office recommends the adoption of Option Three. Under this option, the SEO would work with the D.C. Public Schools, the two Eligible Chartering Authorities, and public charter schools to

- agree on common data definitions;
- develop data quality standards and quality assurance procedures;
- develop data requirements, formats, procedures, and a schedule for the proposed public reporting system;
- design a cumulative, publicly accessible storage and retrieval system (database) built around clearly established indicators and managed by the SEO; and
- design a schedule of public reports that would be prepared and released periodically by the SEO.

With the approval of the recommended option for this function, the SEO would be granted the authority to work in consultation with the Board of Education, DCPS, the chartering authorities, representatives of public charter schools, and others to define the set of data to be reported, regulate usage of common data definitions, establish policy for quality assurance procedures, exercise responsibility for creating, monitoring, and managing a repository of information that is reliable and accessible, and for issuing reports that are based on the data that have been collected.

Rationale

The need for an improved and more publicly accessible source of information about schools has been voiced by many individuals and organizations across the District of Columbia and is a matter of public record. To this end, the SEO believes that by accepting this responsibility it could make a fundamental contribution to the quality of elementary and secondary education in the District. Among the several important benefits would be the following:

- By providing comparable, reliable information about each school in the District of Columbia, including descriptions of programs and results, the SEO would provide parents with the information they need to make better choices of where to enroll their children. This would be a powerful incentive for all schools to improve their programs.

- By gathering and disseminating carefully selected information known to be powerful indicators of educational quality, the SEO would provide educators and policy-makers with data that could be relied upon to form the foundation for school reform and program improvement efforts.
- By building a high-quality, cumulative database over a period of years, and by including common data sets (such as dropout rates) using the same definitions and collection intervals as other respected data bases (e.g., The National Center for Education Statistics), the SEO would provide researchers with the tools needed to conduct longitudinal and comparative research that could be of great value in designing and implementing educational improvements in the District of Columbia.

The State Education Office is not proposing that it become directly involved in the efforts of DCPS or public charter schools to manage and improve their own internal information systems, nor is it the intent of the SEO to intervene in the execution of current reporting requirements to fulfill various mandates. Nonetheless, the efforts to standardize the data elements and strengthen the quality assurance procedures for public reporting are very likely to result in improvements in the internal information systems of DCPS, charter schools, and chartering authorities.

E. Application of Decision Criteria

This section contains the State Education Office's assessment of the degree to which SEO's assumption of responsibility for establishing standardized requirements for annual reporting of statistical information from public and public charter schools would satisfy the stated decision criteria.

1. Consistency With the Vision and Mission of the SEO

Acting as a leader in the area of establishing standardized reporting requirements and serving as a source of accurate and trusted information is a key element of the SEO vision.

2. Effect on the Transferring Agency

The responsibility for collecting and reporting data is not being removed from DCPS nor from charter schools. The purpose of this SEO responsibility is to improve the way core information is collected, reported, and used.

3. Effect on the Quality of Educational and Other Services to Children and Adults

This responsibility should improve the quality of data available to local school and District personnel, to policy-makers, the press, parents, and the public. Under the recommended option, the SEO will develop standardized procedures to provide information to those who have been charged with improving the quality of educational

services to children and adults, as well as to the providers, customers, and beneficiaries of public education in the District of Columbia, particularly students and parents.

4. Potential for Duplication of Functions

Assumption of this responsibility by the SEO will not create duplication. There is no office or agency that now sets standardized requirements for annual reporting for both DCPS and public charter schools and makes that information publicly available.

5. Effect on Reporting Requirements

The SEO presumably would not be requesting any data beyond those that DCPS and public charter schools should already be publicly reporting. However, the information might be requested in new reporting formats and might require certain standardized definitions of data elements that could change the way information is collected, entered into the system, and reported. This could cause some immediate increase in effort, but would not impose additional requirements in the long term. It is fully anticipated that any such standardized requirements would be jointly developed with the Board of Education, DCPS, the chartering authorities, and representation from public charter schools.

6. Potential for Conflict of Interest

Virtually all the individuals interviewed by SEO staff as part of this study agreed that there is a need for establishing standards for reporting reliable, comparable data across all components of elementary and secondary education in the District of Columbia. They view the SEO as a neutral party that will carry out this responsibility fairly.

7. Effect on Cost

This is a new, not a transferred, function; therefore, it would not carry existing resources with it. There would be some cost to the SEO for managing the responsibility, and some minimal added cost to DCPS, the chartering authorities, and perhaps to individual public charter schools. The extent of these costs is examined in the Transition Plan, which follows.

F. Transition Plan for the Assumption of the Function: Standardized Requirements for Annual Reporting

Because the State Education Office would be assuming a function that is not now the responsibility of any public or charter school office, the transition plan will not call for explanation of transfer of responsibilities from one office to another.

1. Authority and Responsibility of Each Party at Each Stage of the Transition

This function would be assumed by the State Education Office since it is not now formally assigned to any other agency. Assumption of this responsibility requires that the SEO provide leadership for the following activities:

- developing plans for creating a list of key indicators that would define the kinds of data that would be publicly reported annually by the District of Columbia Public Schools, by public charter schools, and, to the extent that it is feasible, by private and parochial schools;
- developing common definitions for data elements;
- developing quality assurance standards;
- establishing a reporting process;
- developing and managing an information database; and
- establishing procedures for making information publicly accessible.

It would be the SEO's strategy to form a working group of appropriate representatives of DCPS, the two chartering authorities, and independent, private, and parochial schools, and selected data users to advise and assist SEO staff and consultants in designing and planning the public reporting system described in this section of the report and in carrying out the activities needed to implement the design. Detailed planning for the implementation of this function must await formal approval by the Mayor and the Council for the SEO to assume responsibility, since the planning and implementation would be carried out with the participation of DCPS and charter school authorities.

During the period from August 1 to September 30, 2001, the SEO would provide leadership for the detailed plan for designing and implementing the system.

During FY 2002, using a similar collaborative process, the actual design work for the information gathering, storage and retrieval system would be conducted. During this time, as decisions and agreements were made, implementation and testing might occur. Costs for hardware, software, and management of the system cannot be estimated until early in 2002.

Full implementation would not occur until FY 2003.

2. Dates and Benchmarks for Assumption of Authority, Responsibility, Budget, and Employees

The SEO would assume authority and responsibility on the date that the D.C. Council ratifies the decision of the Mayor of the District of Columbia, since we believe no

legislative or administrative authority is needed for this function beyond the State Education Office Establishment Act of 2000. We anticipate that the date might be as early as August 1, 2001.

Since this function is not formally assigned to any agency at this time, SEO assumption would not require any transfer of budget authority. The cost of this activity would be included, along with other core functions, in the SEO's general budget authority.

For the same reason, assumption of the responsibility would not result in the transfer to the SEO of any employees.

3. Estimated Cost to the SEO for the Assumption and Management of the Function and the Recommended Sources of Revenue

During the remainder of Fiscal Year 2001 (through September 30, 2001), additional planning activities would be conducted under the management of a technical consultant.

Estimated FY 2001 cost \$ 12,000 (240 consultant hours)

During Fiscal Year 2002, one FTE of a mid-level professional staff person, plus 500 hours of consultant time would be assigned to this function.

Estimated FY 2002 cost \$ 81,000 (1 FTE SEO staff)
35,000 (500 consultant hours)

4. Factors With Potential for Disrupting Services to Students and Recommended Steps to Prevent Such Disruption

Assumption of this function has no potential for disrupting services to students.